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THE FINGER OF SCORN

BY

ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS



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THE FINGER OF SCORN

A Play in Four Acts

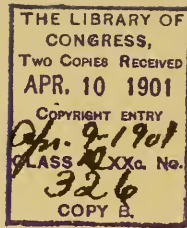
by

ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS

Author of "The Fruit of His Folly," "The Heart of a Hero,"
"A Scheme That Failed," Etc.

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The Finger of Scorn

CAST OF CHARACTERS

REV. PHILIP DUNCHESTER *Rector of St. Mark's*
NORMAN WEIR *His college friend—a detective*
RICHARD HERITAGE, M.D. *Commonly called "Doctor Dick"*
JOHN GORDON *A fugitive*
SHERIFF BLAKE
PETERS *The sexton*
IRENE ARNOLD *With a heart history*
BESS . . . *The minister's sister—"a bit of a butterfly"*
MRS. PICKINS *A busy dressmaker*
AUNT BINA

VILLAGERS AND OFFICERS

TIME IN REPRESENTATION—About three hours

Notice to Professionals.—This play is published for amateur production only. Professionals are forbidden the use of it in any form or under any title without the consent of the author, who may be addressed in care of the publishers.

SYNOPSIS

- ACT I.—Morning at the Rectory. The gossip. June roses. A doctor's patience. The gossip has "something to tell." The breath of suspicion. The marked paragraph. A loyal love. For another's sake. A woman's secret. The shadow of a sin. Despair.
- ACT II.—The garden party. Love's young dream. A woman scorned. The gossip repulsed. The detective. Face to face. The proposal and the threat. Defiance. "Until to-morrow." The festivities interrupted. The gossip speaks. Behind the syringa bushes. "Who was that man?" A timely appearance. "He is here!"
- ACT III.—In the shadows. "I defy you!" "Lead, Kindly Light." The face in the window. The escaped convict. In danger. The minister's devotion. Behind the curtain. Suspected. The revelation.
- ACT IV.—The gossip still on the scent. A professional secret. A lovers' quarrel. Two men and one woman. 'Twixt love and law. A proof of friendship. Love's sacrifice. "For her sake." The lovers are reconciled. The search. Found. "He is free!"

COSTUMES

PHILIP. Ministerial suit ; same throughout.

WEIR. Act II.—Evening dress. Acts III and IV.—Light summer suit, with straw hat. He has the air of a rather stylish man-of-the-world.

DOCTOR DICK. Act I.—Summer business suit. Act II.—Evening dress. Act IV.—Tennis suit.

GORDON. Rough, worn suit, shirt open at neck. He presents a hunted, dejected appearance, and is pale, haggard and unshaven. In Act IV he looks neater and is shaved, but is paler.

BLAKE. Rough trousers and vest ; blue or red shirt, with no coat ; slouch hat.

PETERS. Plain suit. He is an old man with flowing white hair.

CONSTABLES. Similar to SHERIFF BLAKE.

IRENE. Act I.—Modest summer dress, with hat. Act II.—Handsome evening gown, not too dressy. Acts III and IV.—Modest dresses.

BESS. Act I.—Pretty, light summer dress, with large hat. Act II.—Airy and somewhat elaborate evening gown ; not too gay. Act IV.—Tennis dress, or similar to Act I.

MRS. PICKINS. Act I.—Prim black alpaca dress, plainly made ; small bonnet. She carries a parasol and a handbag. Act II.—A “dress-up” costume, unique and prim without being too odd or unbecoming for a dressmaker. She must not be a caricature, although of an appearance to excite mirth ; should have quick, nervous movements, speak rapidly in a high-pitched voice and have some characteristic mannerisms. Act IV.—Similar to Act I, or the same.

AUNT BINA. Act I.—Negro make-up ; woolly wig, etc. ; plain calico or gingham dress, with apron and cap or turban. Act II.—Her “best dress,” with fancy head-dress, a large neckerchief, etc. Acts III and IV.—The same as, or similar to, Act I.

PROPERTIES

ACT I

Bunch of roses. Stamped and addressed letters; newspaper in wrapper, with plainly marked paragraph. Newspaper bundle. Small medicine case. Glass of water. Fan.

ACT II

Tables, one with plates of cake, another with punch bowl of colored water, representing lemonade, and glasses.

ACT III

Parlor lamp, lighted and turned down low.

ACT IV

Tennis racquets. Light shawl thrown over back of chair.

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ACT I

SCENE.—*A room in the rectory, nicely furnished. Across corner, R. U. E., is a double door leading to another room, with portières looped back. There is a window in flat, L. C., the curtain of which is raised; also a door in flat, C., with lock and key. Table down R. C., on which are books, papers, etc.; sofa L. C., and up L. a mantel or stand with a pair of empty vases. As the curtain rises knocking is heard at door C. After a pause it is repeated and Mrs. Pickins looks in; she waits a moment and then tiptoes across to R. U. E. and knocks there loudly.*

MRS. PICKINS. Land! ain't there nobuddy t' home? I d' know 's I ought t' walk right in; 'tain't my way, but I knocked and knocked! It's the queerest thing I ever heard of for them t' all go off and leave the doors unlocked. (*Calls.*) Anybuddy t' home? (*Pause.*) Well, I declare! (*BESS is heard singing off R.*) There! I hear somebuddy. (*Looks off.*) It's Bess, and she's comin' in here. My! she's a pretty gay piece for a minister's sister. It's my opinion he ain't none too strict with her.

(*Enter BESS, R. I E.; she has on a large summer hat and carries a bunch of roses.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Good-afternoon.

BESS. Why, Mrs. Pickins, is that you? I didn't know there was any one here. (*Lays roses on table R. C.*)

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MRS. PICKINS. There wa'n't a minute ago. I knocked and knocked, and as there didn't anybuddy come to the door, I walked right in, though 'tain't my way. Where's Mr. Dunchester?

BESS. He was in his study not long ago, working on his sermon. Do you wish to see him? *(She has brought vases and is arranging flowers.)*

MRS. PICKINS. Yes, I do. I've got somethin' t' say to him.

BESS. Very well, only if you could wait a little while. I hate to disturb him just now.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, all right then. I wouldn't want to disturb nobuddy. 'Tain't my way. But what I've got to say is important, and I guess he'll think so.

BESS. Then I will call him, by all means. *(Starts.)*

MRS. PICKINS. No, you needn't. Where's Biny?

BESS. Out in the kitchen, I guess. *(Returns.)*

MRS. PICKINS. Well, I'll go out and see her first. She's got a dress she wants me t' fix over. Mebby he'll be through by that time. *(Hangs handbag on back of chair, L., and goes down L.)* I guess I've got something to tell him.

(Exit MRS. PICKINS, L.)

BESS. I shouldn't be surprised. It would be a wonder if she didn't have something to tell. But Philip said he didn't want to be disturbed and I don't believe her business can be so very important. I guess it will keep a few minutes. There! those roses are all fixed. How lovely they are! I do think June is such a beautiful month. *(She is replacing vases, when knocking is heard off C. D. L.)* Now, who is that, I wonder? *(Knocking is repeated.)* Dear me, what a hurry they must be in. *(Removes hat and hangs it on back of chair, R.; goes to C. D. and shows in DICK HERITAGE; he carries a small medicine case.)*

DICK. Why, how do you do, Bess?

BESS. Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Heritage. *(Both down C.)*

DICK. Mister Heritage! *(Places case on chair.)*

BESS. Oh, I beg pardon. Doctor Heritage, of course. *(Curtsies.)*

DICK. No, that isn't a bit better.

BESS. Why, what would you have me say?

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DICK. What's the matter with Dick?

BESS. I—I don't know as there's anything the matter with him,—only ——

DICK. Well, only what?

BESS. Why, you see, you're a great man now. You've hung out your shingle; you're the village doctor.

DICK. Village fiddlesticks! I am still Dick Heritage and as much your old friend as ever; am I not?

BESS. I—I hope so.

DICK. Of course I am. Then say "Dick," as you always have.

BESS. Well, then—yes, Dick, it's a very pleasant day, isn't it? There, is that better?

DICK. Better—m'm—yes, but rather—er—distant. (*Close to her.*)

BESS (*not encouraging him; tantalizingly*). Did you wish to see anybody in particular? There's no one sick here.

DICK. Oh, I don't know. (*Places hand on heart and sighs sentimentally.*)

MRS. PICKINS (*off L.*). All right, Biny, I'll see that you have it inside of a week.

BESS. There comes Mrs. Pickins.

DICK. Hang Mrs. Pickins!

BESS. No; you doctor her. No doubt that would be an easier way of getting rid of her. (*Laughs.*)

DICK. How unkind!

BESS. To her? Oh, yes. Ha! ha! ha!

(*Enter MRS. PICKINS, L. She carries a good-sized newspaper bundle, which she soon lays on chair, L.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Why, you here, doctor? Who's sick?

DICK. Nobody that I know of. I hope there hasn't got to be somebody sick every place I go.

MRS. PICKINS. Well, I've heard enough to make me sick. I suppose you have heard about it?

(MRS. PICKINS, L. C.; DICK, C.; BESS, R. C.)

DICK. About ——?

MRS. PICKINS. Why, about Irene Arnold and the school. Land! 'tain't no secret. Everybuddy knows she's been asked to explain a few things or get out.

DICK. Yes, I have heard, and I think it's an outrage!

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MRS. PICKINS. Oh, you're stickin' up for 'er, be you? It's kind of you, I must say, and I guess she needs it. Well, I ain't sayin' nothin' t' injure her. 'Tain't my way. But some things look kind o' strange.

DICK. Yes, and others look mighty cruel and most un-charitable.

BESS. What is it, Dick, about Miss Arnold?

MRS. PICKINS. I ain't here t' argue the question. (*To BESS.*) Can I see the minister now?

BESS. I think so. I'll go and see.

(*Exit BESS, R. U. E.*)

DICK. I suppose you came here to see Mr. Dunchester about this matter?

MRS. PICKINS. Mebby I did and mebby I didn't. I hain't asked you what you come here for and I don't know as you've got any call to ask me.

DICK. Why, no, of course not. I beg your pardon and thank you for the lesson in politeness. (*Goes R.*)

MRS. PICKINS. What's that? I must say you're pretty impudent.

(*Enter BESS, R. U. E.*)

BESS. My brother will see you now, Mrs. Pickins.

MRS. PICKINS. I'm much obliged. I'll go right in, shall I?

BESS. Yes; he is in his study.

MRS. PICKINS. I know where that is.

(*Exit MRS. PICKINS, R. U. E.*)

BESS. I wonder what she has to say.

DICK. Oh, she's always hatching up something. She's the worst gossip I ever saw.

BESS. It's something about Irene Arnold. What is it? (*Both c.*)

DICK. Why, I don't know exactly. I believe they have asked her to resign her position as teacher of the village school.

BESS. Resign? For what? What have they against her, I should like to know?

DICK. Well, I don't believe they know that themselves. But you know much may be surmised and hinted about a young woman who goes to a place as Miss Arnold came here, and tells nothing about herself or her family.

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BESS. H'm! It's a pretty way to treat such a lovely girl as she is. Surely, you don't believe she has done anything wrong?

DICK. No, indeed; far from it. I believe her all that she has seemed to be during the three years she has been among us. But others——

BESS. Such as Mrs. Pickins, for instance.

DICK. Well, I believe she has considerable to do with it, for all she pretends to be so innocent. Anyhow, somebody has started a rumor that Miss Arnold has something to hide—something she is afraid to tell.

BESS. And does any one believe that?

DICK. I am afraid so. At any rate, she was called before the school board this afternoon and as she would not answer questions nor seek to clear herself of suspicion, she was asked to resign, which she did.

BESS. It's the meanest thing I ever heard of. Irene Arnold, whom so many of us have learned to love, and who is so refined and sweet and—why, they must be crazy! I'll bet my brother will almost forget he's a minister and get mad. He thinks a good deal of Miss Arnold.

DICK. Ah, I guess it's more than that. I am glad she will have him for a champion.

BESS. And she will have me, too.

DICK. And me. Shake!

(They shake hands heartily.)

BESS. I guess it will come out all right. *(Enter BINA, L., with papers and letters.)* Oh, is that the mail, Aunt Bina?

BINA. Yes, missy; Peters done brung it up fr'm de offis jes' now.

(BESS takes mail and looks it over, then places it on table.)

DICK. Good-afternoon, Aunt Bina.

BINA. Af'noon, doctah.

DICK. How are you nowadays?

BINA. Purt well, t'ank yo'. Need n' t'ink yo' gwine git none o' my money jes' yit. I ain' got no use f' doctahs. He! he!

(Exit BINA, L., laughing.)

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DICK. That's just the way it goes. Everybody thinks I want to dose them with medicine. Do you suppose this school affair will interfere with the garden party to-morrow night?

BESS. I don't see why it should. Everything is all ready. I don't see how we can postpone it or anything.

DICK. I hardly think it will be necessary.

BESS. No, of course not.

(*Enter MRS. PICKINS, R. U. E., followed by PHILIP DUNCHESTER. They pause well up R.*)

PHILIP. I think the members of the school board have acted very hastily, Mrs. Pickins, and will regret the step they have taken.

MRS. PICKINS. I don't know what else they could do. It's my opinion she ain't fit to have charge of decent folks' children and be 'sociatin' with respectable people while there's suspicion hangin' over her.

PHILIP. The suspicion is entirely ungrounded and they have proved nothing against Miss Arnold.

MRS. PICKINS. I'd like t' know. Ain't it something that she ain't got a word to say for herself?

PHILIP. No. I am sure that she will speak at the proper time. (*Sees DICK.*) Ah, doctor, how do you do? (*Coming down.*)

DICK. Well, thank you, Mr. Dunchester. (*They shake hands.*) I needn't ask if you are the same.

PHILIP. For fear I will think you are seeking a patient, eh? I see you have your case. (*Indicating medicine case on chair.*)

DICK. Y-yes, it's the only one I have at present.

MRS. PICKINS (*coming down*). Land! ain't one enough?

DICK. Well, hardly. (*Others smile.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, I see. Well, you must have patience.

DICK. I know I must. That's just it. And it doesn't make any difference how you spell it.

PHILIP. Come, come, doctor, no punning.

DICK. I beg pardon.

MRS. PICKINS. I guess you'll get along. 'Twas a good thing for you when old Dr. Spoor died. Folks couldn't go back on him as long as he could tell pep'mint from pikry.

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DICK. No, of course not.

BESS. Somebody will be sick before long, I guess. Hope for the best.

MRS. PICKINS. The idee !

BESS. Doctors have got to live.

MRS. PICKINS. And let live, I should hope. (*Going up.*) Well, I must go.

BESS. Must you, Mrs. Pickins?

MRS. PICKINS. Yes, I must. I jest run over to see if we was goin' to have the lawn party here to the rect'y t'-morrow night, jest th' same.

BESS. Why, of course. Why not?

MRS. PICKINS. Mebby you don't understand. (*In c. d.*) Of course, it's jest as you say, Mr. Dunchester. 'Tain't my doin's and I ain't meddlin', I hope. 'Tain't my way. (*About to exit, when she turns and comes part way down c. again.*) I s'pose you've all heard about the sheriff? (*They reply "No!" "What is it?" etc.*) Nothin', only he's got word to watch for escaped convicts. Three of 'em's escaped from the state's prison and they've sent him word to kind o' be on th' look for 'em.

PHILIP. Have the authorities any reason for believing that the fugitives will be found in this locality?

MRS. PICKINS. I couldn't say. (*Again about to exit.*) I jest heard that much on my way over here. I didn't git no p'ticulars. Land! I must take my bundle. (*Returns and takes bundle from chair.*) So you think we'll have the lawn party jest th' same, Mr. Dunchester? (*Again going up.*)

PHILIP. By all means, if nothing further happens to prevent.

MRS. PICKINS (*in c. d.*). Very well, then. I didn't know. Good-day.

PHILIP. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Pickins. (*Sees her out.*)

(*Exit MRS. PICKINS, C. D. L.*)

DICK. Well, she's brimful of news and no mistake.

BESS. She's a meddling gossip, that's what she is.

PHILIP (*coming down*). Bess, you should not speak so disrespectfully.

BESS. Oh, no, I suppose not. You're a minister and have

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got to look for good qualities in everybody. I guess you'll have to have a telescope to find any in her.

PHILIP. I am sure Mrs. Pickins has her good points.

BESS. Yes, her pins and needles, maybe. (DICK laughs; PHILIP smiles.)

(Enter MRS. PICKINS, C. D. L., unnoticed.)

DICK. I don't believe they're her sharpest ones, though. I wonder if her sewing machine runs as fast as her tongue.

MRS. PICKINS. I forgot my bag and come back after it. (Rushes down L., seizes handbag from chair and exits C. D. L., hurriedly.)

DICK (taken back). Well!

BESS. Goodness!

DICK. Do you suppose she heard what I said?

BESS. Of course she did, and I'm glad of it. It's my opinion she left that bag on purpose. (Goes up and looks off.) But she's gone now, fast enough. Look at her go.

DICK (up C., looking off). You'd think she had only eight seconds to get there.

(BESS and DICK in C. D., PHILIP seated L. of table, looking over letters.)

BESS (as she comes down, after pause during which she and DICK converse in pantomime). Isn't it too bad, Phil, about Miss Arnold?

PHILIP. So you have heard? (Looking up.)

BESS. Why, yes; Mrs. Pickins told us. She says everybody is talking about it.

DICK (coming down). I heard of it before I came over, too.

PHILIP. Yes, it is indeed too bad; but I am sure we shall be able to straighten it out all right.

DICK. I hope so, I'm sure.

(PHILIP is again examining letters, while BESS, who is seated R. of table, carelessly tears the wrapper from a newspaper, and reads. There is a short pause.)

PHILIP. You will excuse me, doctor, if I look over these letters?

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DICK. Certainly. I was just going, anyway. (*Taking medicine case.*)

PHILIP. Don't be in a hurry.

DICK. Well, I must get back to the office. I presume my slate is full of urgent calls by this time.

PHILIP. No doubt. (*He and DICK laugh.*)

BESS (*interested*). Here's something marked in this paper. Why, it's about an escaped convict. Perhaps it is one of those Mrs. Pickins was telling about.

PHILIP. Ah, the paper must be from Norman Weir, who wrote this letter.

BESS. Norman Weir? Who is he?

PHILIP. An old college friend of mine. I have not seen him for several years. He was a lawyer then, but is now a detective, and says he intends to combine business with pleasure by visiting us for a few days and doing some professional work at the same time.

DICK (*who has paused in C. D.*). Here?

PHILIP. Yes. He says he has reasons to suspect that an escaped prisoner whom he is after will turn up in this vicinity.

DICK. Indeed!

BESS. Goodness! What makes him think that?

PHILIP. He does not tell. But he will be here to-morrow. What does the marked paragraph say?

BESS. Why, it's about the escape of several prisoners and speaks in particular of one named John Gordon, who was formerly president of a bank in Proctor and who was sent to prison for twelve years for embezzlement. (*She has been referring to paper; now rises, hands it to PHILIP, indicating the marked passage. He glances at it.*)

DICK (*in C. D., about to go*). That must be the very man your detective is after.

BESS (*to DICK*). If you like, I'll walk down to the village with you. I have an errand at the store.

DICK. I shall be delighted.

BESS (*putting on hat*). All right. I'm ready.

DICK. Good-day, Mr. Dunchester.

PHILIP (*looking up from paper*). Going, doctor? I suppose we will see you at the lawn party to-morrow evening? (*Rises.*)

DICK. Oh, yes; I wouldn't miss it for the world.

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BESS (*in c. d. with DICK*). A detective! I shall detest him, I know.

DICK. Don't be too sure.

(*Exeunt BESS and DICK, c. d. l.*)

PHILIP. (*Again glances at paper, then lays it on table, spread out so that the marked paragraph is plainly visible.*) Norman Weir. I have not seen him for—it must be five or six years. So he has given up practicing law and become an expert detective. Well, it is a business I cannot admire, although it may be entirely honorable and just. (*Takes letters and again looks over them as he goes up and stands in c. d., looking off. Meditatively.*) Poor Miss Arnold. How disheartened and discouraged she must be. It is all the outcome of an idle piece of gossip, and I feel sure that she will explain, and silence those who are criticising her.

(*Exit PHILIP, r. u. e.*)

(*After brief pause, enter BINA L. She carries a recipe book, over which she is pondering.*)

BINA. Ah 'clar t' goodness. Ah done got stuck makin' dis ar angel's cake. Ah cayn't figger 't out no how. (*Studies book, then looks about.*) Wonder whar Miss Bess am gone. (*Calls.*) Missy! Miss Bess! whar be yo'? Lan' o' massy, 'f she a'n't gone off an' lef' me stuck right in de middle o' dat ar cake. (*Calling.*) Bess! be'n't yo' yuh? (*Goes up and looks off c. d. r., then c. d. l.*) Dar's somebuddy comin'. Ah 'clar t' goodness 'f 'ta'n't Miss Arnold, an' she looks jes' 'bout tuckered out. Come right 'long in, Miss Irene. (*Meets IRENE, who comes in from l. She is rather pale and somewhat agitated.*) What is it, Miss Irene? Be yo' sick?

IRENE. No, Aunt Bina, not sick; only tired after my walk in the hot sun. I will be all right after I have rested a moment. (*Down c.*)

BINA. Set right down yuh, an' Ah'll git yo' a glass o' watah. (*Takes fan from table and hands it to IRENE, who sits l. of table.*)

(*Exit BINA, l.*)

IRENE. Perhaps I should not have come here—to him. It

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will make more talk; I was even watched as I came, and they will say that it was bold of me to come. But I have no other refuge—no other friends to whom I can go. (*Covers face with hands, disconsolately.*) It is almost more than I can bear.

(*Enter BINA, L., with glass of water.*)

BINA. Here 'tis, nice 'n' fresh fr'm de well.

IRENE (*drinks*). Thank you, Aunt Bina; that is very refreshing.

BINA (*taking glass*). Feel better now?

IRENE. Oh, yes; much better. I was tired, that is all. (*BINA goes L.*) Is—is Mr. Dunchester at home?

BINA (*pausing*). Ah reckon 'e is. Ah done seen 'im jes' li'll while 'go. D' yo' wan' t' see 'im?

IRENE. If he is not too busy.

BINA. Ah reckon 'e a'n't never too busy t' see some folks, an' Ah cal'late you's one ob 'em. Ah'll go tell 'im.

IRENE. If you will, please. (*Exit BINA, R. U. E.*) I must see him and tell him all. He will advise me and tell me what to do. (*Rises.*) How they tortured me this afternoon, those men who plied me with cruel questions and demanded that I tell them all my past. But I would not—I could not. I knew that my silence was like a confession of guilt, but I would not speak until I had seen Mr. Dunchester and asked his advice. (*During the above she has walked L., then returned to table; leans on back of chair, L. of table, and her gaze falls casually on the outspread paper. For a moment she seems not to comprehend what she reads; it gradually dawns upon her; she seems terror stricken, takes up paper and reads.*) Escaped! he has escaped! No, no! it cannot be. And yet, it says so here. He will seek me—come here, perhaps. Oh, the disgrace, the misery! How could he do it? It will be all the worse—all the worse for him and for me. (*Clutches paper tightly and leans heavily on table.*) I cannot tell Mr. Dunchester now. I dare not. I must go away, with him—far away, where we can hide our misery and disgrace. (*Drops the crumpled paper on floor, R. C., well back, and turns up C., meets PHILIP.*)

(*Enter PHILIP, R. U. E.*)

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PHILIP. Miss Arnold—Irene!

IRENE (*going to L. C.*). Mr. Dunchester, I—— (*Stretches out hand toward him, then falters, turns away and stands with drooping head, back to audience.*)

PHILIP (*R. C.*). No, do not turn from me—now, when you need me most. Irene, I know all.

IRENE (*turning to him*). All? No, no; you do not know!

PHILIP. I know that you are persecuted—that I would be your defender. Will you not give me the right?

IRENE. The right?

PHILIP (*holding out his hands*). Yes, Irene, the right—the best right in the world; because I love you!

IRENE (*after slight pause; painfully*). N-no, it—it cannot be.

PHILIP. Not be? Oh, do not let that be your answer!

IRENE. It must be. I can give no other.

PHILIP. But——

IRENE. Do not ask me why. Believe that I am not worthy——

PHILIP. No, I will not believe that. I will accept but one reason—that you do not love me. Can you say that that is why you will not be my wife?

IRENE. I—I have only one answer—I cannot be your wife. Even if I loved you I could not ask you to share my disgrace.

PHILIP (*shocked*). Disgrace!

IRENE. Yes, disgrace—misery—shame. I have been accused of having a secret, a dark past. I have. A secret I cannot tell; a past I dare not disclose, for it hides a hideous sin.

PHILIP. But it is not upon your soul. Tell me that it is not.

IRENE. No, thank Heaven, it is not upon my soul. But it is a sin for which I must suffer. This is a part of the penalty which I must pay. (*She turns from him and starts up C.; he stands between her and the door, with arms open to detain her.*)

PHILIP. Then you shall not bear it alone. Whatever it may be, tell me and let me share it.

IRENE (*drawing back to L. C.*). No, you cannot. I cannot tell my secret—not even to you. Only this; there is another who has a claim upon me and I must be true to him.

PHILIP. To him? There is—another—man?

THE FINGER OF SCORN

IRENE. Y-yes.

PHILIP. To whom you are bound—whom you love?

(She hesitates a moment, then bows assent and turns away, burying her face in her hands. PHILIP looks at her sadly; turns to go up R. His foot touches the newspaper on floor; he starts, stoops and picks it up, glances at marked paragraph, then looks at IRENE significantly, seems about to speak, but turns and exits slowly, R. U. E., with paper. She stands motionless until he has disappeared, then comes down, sinks into chair, burying her face in arms on table, sobbing.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Another room in the rectory, or same as Act I. Doors and windows are open, disclosing piazza and lawn, gaily decorated with Japanese lanterns. This setting may be elaborated or modified to suit convenience. Near R. U. E., is a table set with cakes, dishes, etc.; at L. U. E., a small table with punch bowl of lemonade and glasses. Discover BINA, by table R., cutting cake; BESS L., stirring lemonade. Soft orchestral music may be heard outside.*

BESS. I hope this lemonade is sweet enough. (*Tastes it.*)
M'm! that's good if I do say so. Anybody come yet, Aunt Bina?

BINA. Yas, honey, plenty ob 'em. Di'n' yo' done see 'em?

BESS. No; I've been too busy. (*Goes and looks off c. D. R.*) Oh, yes, there's quite a number. Mrs. Pickins, for one, in all her glory.

BINA. Huh! she done come 'long 'nough 'go. Got new dress, a'n't she?

BESS. I should say so. (*Returns to table.*) Isn't she an awful busybody, though? I lay it all to her about Miss Arnold. Poor soul, hasn't she been downstairs yet?

BINA. Not yit. Ah reckon she feels too bad, with ev'ry-buddy talkin' 'bout 'er. Ah calls it a shame, Ah does.

BESS. And so do I—a downright, wicked shame. Poor thing, she didn't know what to do when Mrs. Brooks turned her out. She was going to leave town, but she had no place to go and we insisted upon her coming here with us, though she seemed to think she mustn't. My, she isn't able to go away alone. She's half sick.

BINA. Pore Miss Irene!

BESS. She's coming downstairs to-night, though, for she told me so. It's better to face them, you know, and not act afraid.

BINA. Dat's so. She a'n't got nuthin' t' be 'fraid of, 's my 'pinion. Say, missy, yo' tasted o' dis ar angel's cake?

THE FINGER OF SCORN

BESS. No, I haven't.

BINA (*taking small piece to her*). Yo' jes' try it.

BESS (*eating*). My! that's scrumptious.

BINA. No, 'ta'n't dat ar kin'. 'S angel's cake.

BESS. Oh, yes; that's why you gave me some, isn't it?

BINA. Yo' a'n't no angel. Yo's jest li'll fly-'way.

BESS. Now, Aunt Bina, how unkind. (*Looks off R.*) Oh, there comes Dick Heritage.

BINA. Is it? Lan', Ah got t' go 'n see t' somethin'. Yo' jes' look aftah dis cake. Will yo', honey? (*Crosses to L.*)

BESS. Oh, yes, I will. You needn't hurry.

BINA. All right. Ah's gwine come back bime by.

(*Exit BINA, L.*)

BESS. I wonder if he's looking for me. I'll bet he is. (*Pause.*) My! how long it takes him. (*Goes and looks off R.*) Why, he isn't coming here at all. He's stopped to talk to somebody else. Oh, yes he is, too! (*Runs back to lemonade and stirs vigorously.*)

(*Enter DICK C. D. R.*)

DICK. Ah, why, good-evening.

BESS (*feigning surprise*). Why, is that you? I had no idea you were coming.

DICK (*aside*). I'll bet that's a fib. (*Aloud.*) How's Rebecca at the well?

BESS. Meaning me?

DICK. Certainly.

BESS. She's all right, thank you. Have a drink?

DICK. No, thanks, not just now. Say, you'll stir the bottom out of that dish.

BESS. I guess I won't. I hope everybody's having a good time.

DICK. I should judge they were. It's early yet.

BESS. Dear me, I'm so worried about Miss Arnold that I can't half enjoy anything. It has just taken the pleasure out of the whole thing.

DICK. Yes, it is too bad. I don't see how Mrs. Pickins and some of those others can bear to show their faces.

BESS. Oh, they think they're doing just right, I suppose. And then, that Mr. Weir's coming, too. That's another damper. Have you seen him yet?

THE FINGER OF SCORN

DICK. Yes, only a few minutes ago. He seems a right nice sort of a fellow.

BESS. I don't believe I like him very well, although he's swell and all that, and I suppose the girls will rave over him. They don't know that he's a detective.

DICK. That's not so terrible.

BESS. No, but I just feel as if he were a perfect snoop, pretending to be our guest, and all the while on such a dreadful errand. Have you seen Miss Arnold this evening?

DICK. Yes; she feels much better and is coming down soon.

(There is a pause, during which DICK, in an embarrassed manner, approaches BESS, as if about to speak, then draws back, stammering, etc. BESS pretends not to notice him, but stirs lemonade vigorously. Business.)

DICK. Bess, I—I was going to say—to say—that is,—*(quickly)*—did you make that lemonade?

BESS. Yes, I did, and it's real good. Have some?

DICK. N-no, I—I'd rather have something—er—sweeter. A—er—kiss, for instance. *(Approaches her.)*

BESS *(jumps)*. There! I've spattered some lemonade on my dress. It will just ruin it.

DICK. Here, let me wipe it off. *(Takes his handkerchief and wipes her dress.)*

BESS. Not there; on this side.

DICK. Oh, yes. *(Reaches around so as to get his arm about her.)* There! is that the place?

BESS. Y-yes.

DICK. Not the place I mean. *(He attempts to kiss her. She escapes him, runs to C. D., and into MRS. PICKINS, who enters from R. MRS. PICKINS carries a fan, which she drops; DICK picks it up.)*

MRS. PICKINS. Good land! What be you tryin' to do?

BESS. Oh, excuse me, please, Mrs. Pickins; I didn't mean to.

MRS. PICKINS. I presume you didn't, but you'd better look where you're goin', next time.

DICK *(presenting fan with a low bow)*. Allow me.

MRS. PICKINS *(taking fan)*. And you're one that 'd better find out whether folks is where they can hear, before you say things about 'em.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

DICK. I suppose it is better to say it behind their backs, the way some people do.

MRS. PICKINS. What's that?

BESS (*in C. D.*). Come on, Dick.

DICK. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Pickins, if I have said anything to offend you, and I hope you will forgive me. (*Up C.*)

MRS. PICKINS (*C.*). I s'pose I will. I ain't one t' lay up nothin'; 'tain't my way.

DICK. Thank you.

(*Exeunt DICK and BESS, C. D. R.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Such a pair! they're pretty gay. (*Sees cake.*) What a nice lot of cake. (*Goes to table.*) There's the one I made. I guess it looks as nice as any of 'em. (*Tastes a piece.*) That's angel cake. (*Critically.*) It's pretty fair; seems t' me it might be sweeter, though, and 'tain't none too light.

(*Enter IRENE ARNOLD, R. I E. She is rather pale.*)

IRENE. Good-evening, Mrs. Pickins.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, that you? Good-evenin'. (*Fussing over cake.*)

IRENE. You seem to be quite busy. (*Crosses to L. C.; sits.*)

MRS. PICKINS. I guess I don't waste much time doin' nothin'. 'Tain't my way. (*Looking at IRENE sharply.*) Seems t' me you look kind o' pale and peaked.

IRENE. I am just recovering from a severe headache.

MRS. PICKINS. Worry, I suppose. I don't wonder. You're stayin' here t' the rect'ry now, ain't you?

IRENE. Why—yes, I am. Bess invited me to stay with her for awhile.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, she did? And the minister, too, I suppose? Didn't you like it boardin' down to Mr. Brookses?

IRENE. Yes, I always found it very pleasant there.

MRS. PICKINS. I kind o' wondered what made you leave so sudden. I heard you talked of leavin' town one spell. I wouldn't 'a' wondered at it, seein' they turned you out of the school.

IRENE (*in distress*). I—why, I—

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, I ain't sayin' nothin' t' hurt your

THE FINGER OF SCORN

feelin's; 'tain't my way. But I don't believe in coverin' things up.

IRENE. I have found that out.

MRS. PICKINS (*coming out from behind table*). What do you mean by that?

IRENE (*rising*). I mean, Mrs. Pickins, that I understand you perfectly. You are not in the habit of sparing any person.

MRS. PICKINS. My sakes! I hope you don't accuse me of havin' anything to do with your trouble.

IRENE. It is said that a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

MRS. PICKINS. And you might add, nor a guilty woman, neither.

IRENE. No; but a woman's accusers do not wait to determine her guilt, if they can find a breath of scandal against her. They do not wait to know the truth. They lash her with their pitiless, gossiping tongues, and seek to devour her reputation. That is what they do; and the lashes that sting the worst are the tongues of other women. I know, oh, I know!

MRS. PICKINS (*a bit abashed*). Do you mean me?

IRENE. Mean you? Do I? Ask yourself whom I mean. It makes no difference. I only know that it is cruel, unjust, and that I can scarcely bear it. (*Covers face and weeps.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Well, it's all your own fault, ain't it? You never told nobuddy where you come from, nor about your folks, nor anything; and yesterday when the school board asked you, you wouldn't tell them a single thing. (*PHILIP DUNCHESTER appears in C. D. and overhears.*) Ain't that suspicious? How do we know what you be, or have be'n? Mebby there's something you're afraid t' tell.

IRENE (*looking at her defiantly*). Afraid? You accuse me——?

MRS. PICKINS. No, I ain't accusin' you. But who's your family? What was you and where'd you come from? Why don't you speak out, if you ain't afraid t'?

IRENE. You have no right to question me.

MRS. PICKINS. Then who has? Who——

PHILIP (*coming down*). Stop! No one shall question her further.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

IRENE. Mr. Dunchester !

(MRS. PICKINS R. C. ; PHILIP C. ; IRENE, L. C.)

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, is that you, Mr. Dunchester ? I didn't see you.

PHILIP. So I perceived, Mrs. Pickins, or perhaps Miss Arnold would have been spared ——

MRS. PICKINS. Land ! I ain't a hurtin' her.

PHILIP. I am afraid you have done so already, and I blush for you, that you have no womanly pity, no kindness of heart that should forbid what you have done.

MRS. PICKINS. You needn't blush for me. I guess she needs the blushin'.

PHILIP. Silence ! If you cannot use even common courtesy I forbid you to say more.

IRENE. Never mind, please, Mr. Dunchester. I, too, have said too much.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, no, it was all me. I must say, things have come to a pretty pass when the minister ——

PHILIP. Madam, you will be kind enough to say no more, but leave us.

MRS. PICKINS (*haughtily*). What ! do you mean to turn me out ? (PHILIP and IRENE are L. C., *talking in pantomime*.) It's nice treatment, I must say. (*After pause and show of indignation*.) Oh, I'll go. I don't stay where I ain't wanted ; 'tain't my way. (*Up toward C. D.*) But I guess this ain't the last of it, as mebbby you'll find out. (*Flounces out C. D. L., in great indignation, unnoticed by PHILIP and IRENE.*)

PHILIP. I am sorry to see you in such distress. I had hoped that you would be spared this.

IRENE. Spared ? No, they will spare me nothing. Oh, Mr. Dunchester, I should not have stayed here ; it was not right. I ought to have gone away.

PHILIP. Gone away ? Where—to whom ? No ; your place is with us—your friends. (*After slight pause—earnestly*.) I cannot give up hope that you will let me be your protector—your ——

IRENE (*drawing away*). It cannot be. I told you. It is for this that I should have gone, because—because ——

PHILIP. Yes, I know, and I ought not to have spoken of it again. This shall be the last. Only do not go away

THE FINGER OF SCORN

until you are quite sure that it is for the best. Promise me that.

IRENE. I promise.

(*They turn to go up C., as BESS and NORMAN WEIR pass C. D., from R. to L., talking and laughing. IRENE starts back, with a stifled cry, and grasps a chair for support.*)

PHILIP. What is it? Are you ill?

IRENE. No; only a trifle faint, that is all. It is nothing.

PHILIP. Let me get some water. (*Starts.*)

IRENE. No, it is not necessary.

PHILIP. Some lemonade. (*Dishes lemonade and hands her.*) Here.

IRENE (*drinks*). Thanks.

PHILIP. Do you feel better now?

IRENE. Yes; but I think I will go to my room, if it will make no difference.

PHILIP. Perhaps it would be best. I will excuse you to the others.

(*She is about to exit R. I E., when BESS enters C. D., from L., followed by NORMAN WEIR. IRENE is forced to remain.*)

BESS. There we were, going right by, when I happened to think that Miss Arnold and Mr. Weir hadn't been introduced yet.

PHILIP. Why, that's so. Miss Arnold, allow me to present my friend, Mr. Weir, of Proctor.

(*IRENE turns, with forced calmness, and bows coldly.*)

NORMAN. I am much pleased to meet Miss—a—Arnold.

(*IRENE betrays agitation, which PHILIP seems to notice.*)

BESS. And now, Philip, you really must come out and make yourself sociable. Everybody is asking where you are.

PHILIP. Very well; I will go out at once and do my duty. (*Up C.*)

BESS. And I'll go, too. (*To IRENE and NORMAN.*) It will give you two a better chance to get acquainted.

PHILIP. You will excuse us?

NORMAN. Certainly.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

(IRENE bows assent; exeunt PHILIP and BESS, C. D. R.
IRENE turns as if to avoid NORMAN; PHILIP glances back.)

NORMAN (*looking at IRENE keenly*). Well, Miss—a—Arnold, I believe we are to get acquainted. Is that it?

IRENE (*coldly*). I trust you will excuse me, sir, if I do not remain.

NORMAN. But I wanted to speak with you, Miss—(*she is going toward R. 2 E.; just as she is about to exit he finishes the sentence*)—Gordon. (*She turns quickly, affrighted.*)

IRENE. Oh,—sh-h—do not betray me; not here—not now. (*Both C.*)

NORMAN. Do not be alarmed. I have no intention of doing so. All I want is to have you remain while I talk with you for a few minutes.

IRENE. Not now—not to-night.

NORMAN. Yes, now—to-night. There is no time to lose. (*Arranges chair, R. C.*) Won't you sit down? (*She looks about, nervously.*) Oh, we are quite alone.

IRENE (*sinking into the chair*). What have you to say to me?

NORMAN. Now, I hope, Miss—Arnold—that you will not prolong the interview by asking what you must already know.

IRENE. Yes, yes, I do know. You are on the track of an escaped convict and you expect to find him here. But this is no reason why you should demand a conversation with me.

NORMAN. Not even when we remember that that convict is your —

IRENE (*rising*). No! Do you think I am hiding him or know his whereabouts? Then you are mistaken. I have not seen him, nor do I know where he is. Now are you not satisfied?

NORMAN. No, for you misunderstand me. I wish you to remember that when last I saw you we had been friends, and I—I dared hope for something nearer and dearer than friendship between us, for (*fervently*) I loved you, Irene, I loved you —

IRENE (*turning from him*). Do not speak of that. It was all ended, long ago.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

NORMAN. Ended? No, my love has not ended. It is deeper, truer than ever, and I have not yet given up hope.

IRENE. You do not know what you are saying. I told you then, as I tell you now, that there is no hope. I told you I did not love you and could never be your wife. Now I have not even friendship for you, much less love.

NORMAN. Then you spurn me again ——

IRENE. I never spurned you. I told you that I could not be your wife, and I tell you again that there is no hope that I ever shall. I ask you to say no more about it; to treat me as a stranger. (*Turns up c.*)

NORMAN (*following her*). And is this all you have to say to me?

IRENE. All.

NORMAN. But it is not all that I have to say to you. Listen. (*She pauses c.*) Three years ago you were a rich man's daughter, far above me in social station. When I asked you to be my wife, you refused, because you were too proud to wed an unknown young lawyer.

IRENE. Be that as it may, all was over between us then.

NORMAN. No, for I have found you again, and in spite of your treatment of me, I still love you and ——

IRENE. Say no more. I will not listen. (*Again about to go.*)

NORMAN. Wait. I think you will listen. (*She pauses.*) The tables are turned now. Your pride is humbled ——

IRENE. Humbled, yes; but not gone. When I left my old home and all who knew me, three years ago, it was to bury the past and begin a new life. Yours is the first familiar face I have seen in all that time. Oh, why have you come here? Was not my fate unkind enough before?

NORMAN. Fate? Perhaps it was that; but you should remember that I am a detective and do not trust too much to fate. It was not fate alone that brought me here.

IRENE. No, it was your desire to hunt down not only a fugitive from justice, but a defenseless woman, one whom you profess to love. (*Scornfully.*) Love! You call this love. If you hated me, you could seek no worse revenge.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

NORMAN. No, no; it is not revenge. I do not seek that, but a reward —

IRENE. A reward? Yes, for his capture. Then win it. Find him; take your reward—money—and go, but leave me at least the consolation of suffering without your presence to intensify it.

NORMAN. You wrong me. (*Close to her; passionately.*) I seek no reward but your hand—your love. Tell me that you will be mine and there is nothing I will not do for you.

IRENE (*slowly comprehending*). You mean that you—you will —

NORMAN. That I will prove my love by saving him, if —

IRENE. You—you will help him to escape,—you —

NORMAN. I will.

IRENE. You could not.

NORMAN. I could. It would be an easy matter. I will aid him to reach some place of safety, where you can sometimes see him.

IRENE. There would still be the risk, the suspense. It would not mean happiness.

NORMAN. I promise you that it shall.

IRENE. You could not keep that promise. I could never be happy as your wife.

NORMAN. But think of him.

IRENE. I do. I think of it all. He would not wish me to make the sacrifice. No, no, I cannot.

NORMAN. Is this your answer? (*She hesitates.*) Think what it may mean if you refuse.

IRENE. I do think, but I—I (*pauses a moment in deep thought*) I will not answer you now. Give me a little time.

NORMAN. There is no time to lose.

IRENE. Until to-morrow.

NORMAN. Well, until to-morrow, then. (*Affectionately.*) And I shall hope. May I not hope? (*He attempts to take her hand, but she draws away, coldly.*)

IRENE. I can give no hope where I have none. You shall have your answer—to-morrow. But remember, until then we are as strangers.

(*Exit IRENE, C. D. L.*)

NORMAN (*after watching her off, comes down*). Perhaps

THE FINGER OF SCORN

I am a fool to be willing to risk so much for her ; but I love her. Of course, there's the reward. It's a lot of money, and I have the man cornered so that it is almost an impossibility for him to escape me. But what's money, if I can win her? But if she throws me over again, let her suffer the consequences, that's all. (*Up ; looking off* C. D. R.) Ah, here comes Duncheater back again. (*Enter* PHILIP, C. D. R.) Well, Philip, it seems to me it didn't take you long to dispense your hospitality.

(*They are down* C ; PHILIP R., NORMAN L.)

PHILIP. Too long. I came away as soon as possible. I wish to speak with you, alone.

NORMAN. Well, we are alone.

PHILIP. Weir, you and Miss Arnold have met before.

NORMAN. Really, you are jumping at conclusions. What put that idea into your head?

PHILIP. Her agitation when you were introduced and your forced air of indifference. There is a secret in her life and you are connected with it.

NORMAN. And you are prying into it. Now, that's woman's work. Don't you think you should leave that to your sharp-tongued parishioner, Mrs. P-Pickles?

PHILIP. Do not jest. This is too serious. Do you think that I am blind? There is a secret ; it concerns an escaped convict, for whom you are searching. Miss Arnold fears you. Tell me, what is this man to her?

NORMAN. Really you are asking too much. I cannot answer.

PHILIP. Very well. But remember this, that poor girl is under my protection. I beg of you—I warn you, not to persecute her.

NORMAN. Persecute her? I? No, no, I would not do that. But—a—you seem deeply interested in her.

PHILIP. Interested? Norman, were you ever in love?

NORMAN (*astounded*). Love? I—you—you love her?

PHILIP. I do ; as a man can love only one woman.

NORMAN. Why,—I—I did not dream of that. And you have asked her to be your wife?

PHILIP. I have ; only yesterday.

NORMAN. And she ——

PHILIP. Refused me.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

NORMAN. Ah !

PHILIP. But I feel that she loves me, I am sure that she does. There is some reason, some obstacle ; this man, this escaped prisoner—is he —— ?

NORMAN. Do not ask me. I cannot tell professional secrets. If she loves you, as you say, why does she not confide in you ?

PHILIP. If she only would. But you can tell me—there is no reason why she should not be mine ? Can you not tell me that much ?

NORMAN (*going up ; coldly*). It is not my affair.

PHILIP. Wait. Tell me the truth.

NORMAN (*in C. D.*). No. You must get that from her. I have nothing to say.

(*Exit NORMAN, C. D. L.*)

PHILIP (*down to R. C.*). Perhaps he is right, and I was prying into that which does not concern me. But it does concern me, it does. And I will not doubt her, whatever comes. I will love and trust her to the end. (*Enter DICK, C. D. R., somewhat flurried.*) Well, Doctor Dick, how's this ? You here, and alone ? Have you deserted the ladies ?

DICK (*down C. ; embarrassed*). N-no, not exactly. You see, I—I wanted to see you just a minute ; to ask you for something, you know.

PHILIP. Very well ; ask me. Anything I have is at your disposal.

DICK. Now,—say, do you mean that ?

PHILIP. To be sure I do. What is it that you wish to borrow ?

DICK. Borrow ? I—I don't. I want it to keep ; something you think a good deal of and may not want to part with. I—wanted you to give it to me. To keep, you know—love, cherish and—and that way.

PHILIP. Why, what can it be ? You—you don't mean—no, surely, not ——

BESS. (*off C. D. R.*). Philip, where are you ?

DICK. That's it.

PHILIP. O-oh—ho-o !

(*Enter BESS, hurriedly, C. D. R., in great excitement.*)

BESS. Oh, Philip, something terrible has happened !

THE FINGER OF SCORN

PHILIP. What? What is it?

BESS (*to* DICK). You go, Dick; they want you. Quick. There by the church, on this side. (DICK *runs out* C. D. R.) Miss Arnold has fallen—fainted, I guess, and is hurt, or something.

PHILIP. Miss Arnold! Hurt! (*Hurries out* C. D. R.)

BESS. Oh, dear, I hope it's nothing serious. (*Goes toward* L. *Calls.*) Aunt Bina! Aunt Bina! Dear me, where is she? (*Calls off* L. *loudly.*) Aunt Bina, where are you?

BINA (*without*). Yes, missy, I'se here.

BESS. Come here, quick!

BINA (*appearing* L.). Here Ah is. What is it?

BESS. Bring the camphor, some water; Miss Arnold has fainted.

BINA. Bress my soul! (*Rushes out* L.)

BESS (*looking off* C. *to* R.). They're bringing her here. She's walking, so I guess it's nothing much. (*Places chair* C., *well down.*)

(*Enter* IRENE ARNOLD, C. D. R., *aided by* DR. DICK and PETERS. PHILIP *is close at hand and several guests follow after, one or two of them entering, others in door and windows.* IRENE *is placed in chair,* C. *Enter* BINA *with water, etc.* *Business of bathing IRENE'S forehead, etc.*)

PHILIP (*to* IRENE). Do you feel better now?

IRENE (*faintly*). Yes, much better. I fainted, that was all. I—I am not well.

DICK. It is nothing serious. She will soon be all right.

IRENE. Yes; it was nothing. (*About to rise.*) Let me go to my room, please. (*Looks about, sees people and sinks back.* *Aside to Philip.*) Oh, please send them away. (*Covers face with hands.*)

(BINA *extreme* R.; DICK and PHILIP *at* IRENE'S L.; BESS *at her* R.; PETERS L. and others *at back.* PHILIP *is about to speak to guests, when* MRS. PICKINS *rushes in,* C. D. R., *greatly excited.*)

MRS. PICKINS (*down* L. *to* L. C.). I've seen a pretty sight! I guess I've got something to say!

BESS. I never saw you when you hadn't.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

MRS. PICKINS. I wasn't snoopin'; 'tain't my way; but I couldn't help what I run acrost. I was jest walkin' 'round th' garden, kind o' careless like, when I got 'round by th' side o' th' church before I knew it.

IRENE (*aside to PHILIP*). Must she tell it?

PHILIP (*aside to IRENE*). Not if I can prevent.

MRS. PICKINS. I didn't notice where I was goin', much, till I heard something behind the syringy bushes, and ——

PHILIP. Never mind, Mrs. Pickins; you need not tell any more.

MRS. PICKINS. Not tell? I'd like t' know why not. I guess it ought t' be told. Peters, here, can back me up in it.

PETERS. It ain't so very much that I know about it.

PHILIP. We will not ask you to tell us about it at present.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, well, if you're so anxious to shield her. But I saw ——

PHILIP. Be silent!

DICK. You ought to be gagged.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh, I suppose you'd like t' give me some of your sickish tastin' med'cine t' do it? Well, you won't get th' chance.

PHILIP (*to guests*). I will ask you all to leave us now. Nothing serious has happened, and Miss Arnold has quite recovered. Please think no more about it.

(*Guests are about to go, but they linger as MRS. PICKINS again speaks.*)

MRS. PICKINS (*loudly*). I guess they will think when I tell.

PHILIP. Mrs. Pickins, I ask you to remain quiet for the present. Will you do that much for me?

MRS. PICKINS. It ain't for you, it's for her, and she don't deserve it. It's my duty to speak out, and I shall.

IRENE (*rising*). Let her speak. If she has anything to say, let them all hear.

PHILIP. Well, then, Mrs. Pickins, what do you wish to tell?

(NORMAN WEIR *appears in C. D.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Well, as I said before, I was walkin' 'round back of th' church, jest strollin', when I heard a rustlin' like behind th' syringy bushes. I screamed out a little, kind o' scart, and at that I see a man jump and

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skulk away, and there was Irene Arnold. He had be'n with her! When she see me, she fell over and fainted away. I run for somebuddy and th' first person I see was Peters, so I told him and then some of the others and they went and found her. (*To PETERS.*) Ain't that so, Peters?

PETERS (*to PHILIP*). That's how it was, sir.

PHILIP (*to MRS. PICKINS*). Did you not recognize the man who ran away?

MRS. PICKINS. No, I didn't. It was too dark for me to see. That's for her to tell. (*Pointing scornfully at IRENE, who does not look up.*)

PHILIP. And is that all, Mrs. Pickins?

MRS. PICKINS. All? I guess it ain't. (*Crossing; to IRENE, insinuatingly.*) You won't tell who that man was. You wouldn't dast!

(*IRENE turns upon her, as if about to speak, then falters.*)

BESS (*to MRS. PICKINS, with her arm about IRENE*). Be still, you heartless thing. I should think you'd be ashamed!

MRS. PICKINS. Then what of her? She's ashamed to tell the truth. (*Crossing back to L. C.*)

PHILIP. Will you never be quiet?

MRS. PICKINS. No; not until she tells who that man was she met alone in th' dark, like a thief. If she ain't afraid to, let her tell!

NORMAN (*coming down; guests fall back*). He is here. 'Twas I!

(*MRS. PICKINS falls back, abashed; others amazed. IRENE at first shows surprise, then relief, looking up boldly.*)

R.	R. C.	C.	L. C.	L.
BESS-IRENE	PHILIP	NORMAN	MRS. PICKINS	DICK-BINA

PETERS AND OTHERS AT BACK

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as before. Just before curtain rises an organ is heard playing a voluntary, softly. There is a short pause after curtain rises before BINA enters L., bearing a lighted parlor lamp, burning dimly, which she places on table R. C. She has difficulty with the wick and fusses over it, turning it up and down. Stage rather dark. The organ music dies away soon after BINA begins speaking.*

BINA. Lan' o' massy, what does ail dis yuh lamp? 'T ac's lak all p'sess. Guess 'f Mahss Phil'p 'r anybuddy done see me now, dey says Ah's lak dem foolish vergums 'thout they lamps trimmed 'n' burnin', de Good Book tole 'bout. 'Tain't mah fault, no how. Ah done trim 'n' fill dat ar lamp dis berry mo'nin', suah. (*Lamp burns all right; lights up.*) Dar he be now, all right. Ah reckon he done ac' contrary on puppose t' try ole Biny's patience. Guess he done do it, too. Ah ain' no Miss Job. (*She rights things on table, etc., humming to herself.*)

(*Enter NORMAN WEIR, C. D., with hat and cane.*)

NORMAN. Good-evening, Aunt Bina. Where's everybody?

BINA. Guess dey's all gone t' ebenin' sarbice, sah; all 'ceptin' Miss Irene; she ain'. Was yo' lookin' f'r anybuddy?

NORMAN. No one in particular. I have just been for a walk. I forgot all about the service. Is it nearly time for it to be out?

BINA. 'Tain't b'gun long 'go, but it don' las' so pow'ful long. Guess dey's time fo' yo' t' go. Mout do yo' good.

NORMAN (L. C.). Ah, so you are trying to do a little evangelistic work? But I don't believe I will go to-night. So Miss Arnold didn't go?

BINA. No, she didn' feel lak it. Ah reckon she ain' none

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too well. She looks lak a ghos', she does. Ah dunno but she's gwine be sick.

NORMAN. Oh, no, I guess not. Dr. Heritage says she will soon be all right. (*He is about to sit, by table, when IRENE enters R. U. E. She is rather pale.*) Ah, here she is now. Good-evening, Miss Arnold. I am glad to see that you are able to come down.

(NORMAN C., IRENE R. C., BINA R. *back.*)

IRENE. I am quite able, I assure you.

BINA. Ah dunno 'bout dat, missy. Ah guess yo' better stayed upsta'rs.

IRENE. Oh, no; I preferred to come down.

BINA. Yo' better be car'ful, dough, 'r yo' might git sick.

(*Exit BINA, R. U. E.*)

NORMAN. You came down because you wished to see me. Am I not right?

IRENE. No; you are mistaken. It was because I promised to see you; not that I wished to do so.

NORMAN. You are none too complimentary. I have been all impatience for your coming—you know why.

IRENE. Yes. You are waiting for my answer to your proposal of last night. You shall have it at once. It is no!

NORMAN (*chagrined*). No! Do you mean that?

IRENE. I mean it.

NORMAN. But I had hoped ——

IRENE. You had no reason to hope. I told you so.

NORMAN. But have you considered what it may mean—to you—to him?

IRENE. I have considered everything. I will not be your wife.

NORMAN. This is final?

IRENE. It is.

NORMAN. After last night—after what I did for you then?

IRENE. For that you have my thanks, if you intended it for a kindness.

NORMAN. I did, most assuredly. I saw you in a tight place and did my best to help you out of it. Of course, I knew the man whom you met, and why you could not tell his name, and offered myself as his sub-

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stitute simply to avert suspicion. I think I succeeded, too.

IRENE. Yes, your ruse was a success in that respect, but if it was intended to win my favor and force me to acknowledge you as my lover, it has failed.

NORMAN. But what will they think?

IRENE. Whatever they will. It can hardly be much worse than they have thought already.

NORMAN. Then you refuse me, and ——

IRENE. And defy you. Do your worst. Send him back to prison, break my heart, do what you will; I am through with you.

NORMAN. And if I do all this, it will be because you drive me to it. You still have a chance of saving him.

IRENE. You have had my answer.

NORMAN. You love another. You prefer my ministerial friend. Am I not right?

IRENE. That does not concern you.

NORMAN. Yes, it does. It makes me jealous, and a jealous man ——

IRENE. I expect no mercy from you.

NORMAN. But believe me, I am sorry for you and shall do only my duty.

IRENE. Duty! Which you are so ready to neglect if you can gain your end. No, I do not believe you. You are not sorry for me. If you were, you would do me the kindness of leaving me alone and sparing me the pain of seeing your face and hearing your voice.
(*Turns, as if to exit R.*)

NORMAN. You are merciless, now. But it shall be as you say. I will leave you. I see you do not desire my friendship.

IRENE (*turning to him*). No, not such friendship—of one who professes to pity and console me, and is all the time working to bring about the culmination of my misery and despair. I think we need say no more.
(*Turns from him.*)

NORMAN. Certainly not. It is quite unnecessary. I will bid you good-evening.

(*Exit NORMAN, C. D.*)

IRENE (*after a slight pause*). I could not endure his hypocritical kindness. I have no faith in him. (*Walks*

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- about.) Oh, this terrible, terrible suspense! What shall I do? What can I do? Nothing, only wait for the blow which soon must fall. (*She goes up to window in flat and stands looking out. An organ is heard playing "Lead, Kindly Light," followed by voices softly singing the hymn. IRENE covers her face and weeps; after a pause, comes down and sits by table.*) Oh, Kindly Light, lead me, it is all so dark—so dark. (*Leans head on hand with arm on table. The singing continues until the first two verses have been sung.*) Oh, Philip, how can I give you up? If I could only tell you all and trust to your love and generous spirit. But no, I must not, I dare not. I will not bring disgrace upon you. I must go away—far away—and yet — (*There is a sudden decisive tapping on the window in flat. IRENE starts in terror, rising.*) What was that? (*She stands a moment in silence and then the tapping is repeated; she turns and sees the face of JOHN GORDON in the window. His pale face and white hair are ghastly in the darkness. IRENE cries out, hoarsely.*) Father! (*Glances about in terror and then goes to window.*) Oh, why have you come here? You will be detected.
- GORDON (*in the window*). You must conceal me. Let me in, quick!
- IRENE. Conceal you! Here? No, no, I cannot! It would not be safe.
- GORDON. You must, I say. Open the door.
- IRENE. I dare not. Oh, you don't know what you ask.
- GORDON. You must. Are you not alone?
- IRENE. Yes, at present; but some one may come at any moment.
- GORDON. Let me in, then, at once. There is no time to lose. They are on my track. There is no other way to escape them. Oh, my daughter, save me! Do not let them take me back to that awful prison.
- IRENE. I must risk it. (*Goes and opens door in flat, admitting him; then locks door, draws the window curtains and leads him down, seating him in chair, R. of table. He is very sick and feeble.*) Now tell me. You are tracked, you say?
- GORDON. Yes; I fear the end is near. (*He leans on table; she falls on her knees by his side.*)

THE FINGER OF SCORN

IRENE. Oh, father, what shall we do? Think of the disgrace—the horrible, horrible disgrace! (*Buries face in his lap, weeping.*)

GORDON. Disgrace? Yes, and think of how I have worked and suffered, weeks, months and years, a felon. Think of my misery, my child, and save me from being taken back to it. (*Rises suddenly, so that she is nearly thrown to the floor.*) No, I will not go back! I will die first!

IRENE (*rising*). No, father, no! I will try to save you. But how—how?

GORDON. Hide me until they have been here and you have convinced them that I am not here. Deceive them, somehow, and save me.

IRENE. Father, can I do that? Listen. I have been turned from the place where I lived, from the school where I earned my daily bread, and am shunned by nearly all who were formerly my friends. Only the noble rector, his sweet sister and two or three others sympathize with me. They have charity—that charity which suffereth long and is kind. They do not question me, but trust and befriend me. Think what it would mean to them, as well as to us, if you were found hidden in this house.

GORDON. Yes, yes, I do think of it—I do; but there is no other way. If you knew all you would not blame me—the opportunity to escape, when others had opened the way; the chance to breathe the free air and see the blue sky again. I could not resist—I could not!

IRENE. I do not blame you, father, but I fear for you. You are not safe here a single moment. I must conceal you.

(*The door in flat is tried from without. They stand terror-stricken. There is a moment's silence, then a knocking on door. GORDON crouches behind IRENE.*)

PHILIP (*without*). Bina! Aunt Bina, open the door.

GORDON (*hoarsely*). What shall we do? Save me, Irene, save me!

IRENE (*under her breath*). I will try. Come. Go in there. (*Helps him off R. U. E., draws portières, then goes and opens door, admitting PHILIP.*)

PHILIP (*as he enters*). Why, Miss Arnold—you!

THE FINGER OF SCORN

IRENE (*striving in vain to be calm*). Yes, I—I locked the door. I was nervous, and ——— (*Stops, grasping chair for support.*)

PHILIP. What is it? What has happened?

IRENE. Nothing, only I—I am not very well. You startled me.

PHILIP. You should not have left your room. I will call Aunt Bina. (*Starts toward R. U. E.*)

IRENE (*springing between him and curtains*). No, no—don't! It is not necessary. I do not need her.

PHILIP (*pausing c.*). Very well. But—what is it? Something has happened. You are agitated. Can't you confide in me?

IRENE. No, no! Please go.

PHILIP. No, do not try to deceive me. (*Pauses, significantly.*) What if I knew?

IRENE. What do you mean?

PHILIP. What if I were to say that you are hiding some one in that room? (*Pointing to R. U. E.*)

IRENE. I would still ask you to trust me—to leave me. Will you not go?

PHILIP. No, not while you need me here. (*Goes and locks door.*)

IRENE. What are you going to do?

PHILIP. Help you—and him.

IRENE. You—you mean ———

PHILIP. That I know there is somebody behind those curtains and that ——— (*He advances toward R. U. E.; she springs to curtains, holding them together.*)

IRENE. No, no! You shall not look!

PHILIP. Irene, you must let me help you. There is not a second to spare, if you would save him.

(*She falters a moment, then throws open the curtains, disclosing GORDON, who springs toward PHILIP.*)

IRENE (*between them*). Father!

PHILIP (*amazed*). Your father!

IRENE. Yes.

GORDON. Don't betray me, sir, I beg of you; for her sake, if not for mine.

PHILIP. Do not be alarmed. I said I would help you and I will do my best, whatever the cost.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

(*There is a loud knocking on door in flat. GORDON and IRENE are terror-stricken; PHILIP remains calm. He is motioning GORDON out R. U. E., when BINA enters R. I E. She is about to speak, but PHILIP holds up his hand and she remains silent; she throws up her hands as she sees GORDON.*)

PHILIP (*to IRENE, in a hoarse whisper, motioning R. U. E.*).
Take him in there, as before.

(*IRENE puts GORDON in R. U. E., and draws curtains. PHILIP hurries BINA off R. I E., whispering to her, then returns. The knocking is repeated.*)

PHILIP (*to IRENE*). Try to be calm.

(*She sits by table, as PHILIP goes and opens door, C., admitting NORMAN WEIR, who is followed by SHERIFF BLAKE and two constables.*)

PHILIP. Well, this is something of a surprise. Good-evening, Mr. Blake.

BLAKE. Good-evening, sir.

NORMAN (*to PHILIP*). I am sorry to disturb you; it seems like an intrusion, I know, but — (*To IRENE.*) Ah, Miss Arnold, I see you again so soon.

(*IRENE, rising, bows coolly, but does not speak.*)

NORMAN. It's business, you know.

PHILIP. Business?

BLAKE. Yes, sir; we're after a man—a convict. We think he's here.

PHILIP. In this house?

BLAKE. Yes, sir. Ain't he?

PHILIP. What reason have you for thinking that he is here?

BLAKE. Well, you see, sir, we traced him to the church, or pretty near there, and then we lost track of him, somehow, and he has managed to give us the slip. But I don't think he can do it again. You see, we just about the same as know that he's in this house.

PHILIP (*to NORMAN*). And is this the result of some of your clever detective work?

NORMAN. Perhaps it is. Anyhow, I agree with Mr. Blake. The man could not very well have gone elsewhere.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

That door was locked, the window curtain drawn——
(*To IRENE.*) They were not so a few moments ago, Miss Arnold.

IRENE. I—no, I—I——

PHILIP. Gentlemen, if you are here on such important business, the sooner it is done, the better. What do you wish to do?

BLAKE. Search this house.

PHILIP. Very well; if you think it necessary.

BLAKE. Well, I should say it was. Wouldn't you, Mr. Weir?

NORMAN. Yes. (*To PHILIP.*) Surely, you can have no objections?

PHILIP. Why should I object?

(*IRENE is R., not facing others, attempting to hide her fear.*

PHILIP is R. C., near her; NORMAN C., BLAKE L. C. and constables L. C., somewhat back.)

NORMAN. Well, we have lost time enough already. (*He and BLAKE make motions to begin the search. They pause as PHILIP speaks.*)

PHILIP. Wait. What if I tell you that there is no one here—that the man you seek is not in this house?

NORMAN. I—I don't know as I could believe you.

BLAKE. See here, Mr. Weir, I ain't goin' to back you up in that. I ain't for doubtin' the parson's word. It's my opinion he wouldn't hide no convict in the rect'ry, and I shan't search if he objects.

NORMAN. Nor will I insist, if Mr. Dunchester says the man is not here and that he has not seen him.

BLAKE (*to PHILIP*). Well, do you want to say that?

(*PHILIP is about to speak, when there is a movement behind the curtains. It is noticed by one of the constables, who calls BLAKE'S attention to it, pointing.*)

BLAKE (*starting*). There's somebody behind them curtains. I seen 'em move. (*Goes toward R. U. E.*)

IRENE (*runs and gets in front of curtains, holding them together*). You shall not look!

BLAKE. I must, miss.

IRENE (*frantically*). No, no; you shall not!

THE FINGER OF SCORN

NORMAN. There is no use resisting, Miss Arnold. You must stand aside.

IRENE (*holding curtains, desperately*). No!

PHILIP. Let them look.

(*She finally relents, almost fainting, as she totters back to R., and is supported by PHILIP. BLAKE goes up and tears aside the curtains, disclosing AUNT BINA, who stands with uplifted hands. The others fall back in amazement.*)

R.
IRENE-PHILIP

R. C.
NORMAN

L. C.
BLAKE

L.
CONSTABLES

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Same as before. A light summer shawl is thrown over the back of a chair, R. Discover NORMAN WEIR seated on sofa, fanning himself with his hat.*

NORMAN. Whew ! but it's hot ! I don't see how Miss Bess and the doctor can stay out there in the broiling sun, playing tennis. It's too much for me. (*Yawns.*) Ho, hum ! I'm sleepy. This weather makes me lazy. (*Yawns and stretches. Looks around.*) 'There's nobody about ; I guess I'll take a nap.

(*Leans back and dozes. After a pause, MRS. PICKINS looks in C. D., then comes down C. She carries a parasol and a waist, rolled up.*)

MRS. PICKINS. Land ! if it ain't that Mr. Weir ; t' sleep, too. How lazy lookin' ! (*About to sit R. C., hits chair against table and wakens NORMAN.*)

NORMAN. Oh, why, is that you, Mrs. Pickins ? Good-afternoon.

MRS. PICKINS. Good-afternoon. Don't let me disturb you. (*Sits L. of table.*)

NORMAN. Oh, not at all. I just thought I'd take a little nap. Warm, isn't it ?

MRS. PICKINS. Dreadful, for June. Go on with your nap, for all me. I'll sew on this waist. (*Unrolls bundle and begins sewing.*)

NORMAN. You are very industrious.

MRS. PICKINS. I guess I don't waste much time doin' nothin'. 'Tain't my way.

NORMAN. You seem to be waisting it now.

MRS. PICKINS. I guess I ain't. Can't you see I'm busy ?

NORMAN. Y-yes ; but isn't that—er—a waist ?

MRS. PICKINS. Land ! if you ain't jest like Dick Heritage, always tryin' t' say something smart. I'd be ashamed to be so friv'lous, if I was a man.

NORMAN. But, of course, being a woman —

THE FINGER OF SCORN

MRS. PICKINS. What's that ?

NORMAN. Oh, nothing. I was only thinking that a man is not to blame because he is unfortunate enough not to be a woman. (*Rises, walks up.*)

MRS. PICKINS. H'm ! Well, they don't many of 'em have enough sense t' see it that way. (*Slight pause.*) Say ! what's the truth about what happened here t' the rect'ry last night ?

NORMAN. Happened ? (*Aside.*) Ah, I see what brought her over—curiosity.

MRS. PICKINS. Why, yes ; I've heard half-a-dozen different stories. They say you're a detective. Be you ?

NORMAN. So ! that's one thing they say, is it ? I wonder how they found out so much.

MRS. PICKINS. That ain't half. They say you're after them escaped convicts, and that you and the sheriff tracked one of 'em here t' the rect'ry. I can't hardly believe it, but —

(*Enter IRENE ARNOLD, R. U. E.*)

NORMAN. Ah, Miss Arnold —

MRS. PICKINS (*aside*). If it ain't her ! I suppose I'll have t' treat her decent. (*Aloud to IRENE.*) How d' do ?

(*IRENE up R. C. ; MRS. PICKINS seated R. ; WEIR L. C.*)

IRENE. Good-afternoon.

NORMAN. You are feeling better to-day ?

IRENE (*coldly*). Yes, thank you.

NORMAN. Won't you sit down ? (*Offers chair.*)

IRENE. No, thanks.

MRS. PICKINS (*rising*). I suppose Biny is in the kitchen ?

IRENE. I presume so.

MRS. PICKINS. I want t' try this basque on her. (*Crosses to L.*) I'll go right in.

(*Exit L., leaving parasol on table. IRENE is about to exit C. D.*)

NORMAN. Miss Arnold — (*She is going toward C. D.*) Will you not let me speak with you ?

IRENE (*turning*). Why should you speak ? There is nothing more to be said between you and me.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

NORMAN. But I—I cannot bear to let it be thus. If I can be nothing more to you, may I not be at least your friend?

IRENE. You have not proved yourself my friend —

NORMAN. But if I do so—if I —

IRENE. I ask no favors of you; I will accept none. You will excuse me. I wish to see Dr. Heritage. (*Going.*)

NORMAN (*going to C. D., ahead of her*). He is on the lawn. Allow me to call him —

IRENE. No, I —

NORMAN. But I insist. I will send him to you.

(*Exit NORMAN, C. D. L.*)

IRENE (*pauses in door, looking after him*). Perhaps I wrong him. But no,—he is only working for an end. I cannot believe in his friendship. (*Comes down.*) Oh, this suspense, this dreadful suspense! Every moment brings a new terror, an added fear, that my father will be discovered. (*Sits on sofa.*) He is so ill, so despondent, and I dare not stay with him.

(*Enter DICK HERITAGE, C. D. L.*)

DICK (*pausing in C. D.*). You wished to see me, Miss Arnold?

IRENE. Yes, doctor. Will you sit here by me? (*Making room for him on sofa.*)

DICK (*looking around, doubtfully*). Yes, thank you; with pleasure. (*Sits by her.*)

IRENE. I must know—I wish to ask you—you have seen him? (*Their heads are close together.*)

DICK. Yes, early this morning, before anybody else was about,—Mr. Dunchester and I. Have you not seen him to-day?

IRENE (*looking about, fearfully*). No; I dare not enter the church. I have been watching for an opportunity. Mrs. Pickins is here now.

DICK. The old catamaran! Why does she persist in coming where she isn't wanted?

IRENE. She always pleads some urgent matter. Never mind; tell me of him.

DICK. I found him very weak and despondent—you see I tell you the plain truth.

IRENE. I want you to tell me nothing else. Go on, please.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

DICK. The little room where he is concealed is too close. He must have more air ; he cannot stand it to remain there.

IRENE. But what can we do ?

DICK. We must remove him from the church to a better place.

IRENE. But dare we—would it be safe ?

DICK. We must risk it ; there is no other way.

(Enter BESS, C. D. L., carrying tennis racket ; starts down C., sees IRENE and DICK, looks at them suspiciously, then tosses her head and flounces out C. D. L.)

IRENE. Yes. He cannot be left there. *(Rises.)*

DICK *(rising, goes up C.)*. I think we can manage it all right. *(Enter MRS. PICKINS, L., unnoticed.)* Now, if you wish to go in the church —

IRENE *(following him ; seeing MRS. PICKINS. Aside to DICK.)* Sh ! there is —

DICK *(seeing MRS. PICKINS)*. Oh !

MRS. PICKINS *(L. C.)*. Land ! What be you goin' in th' church for, this time o' day ? There ain't no meetin', is there ?

IRENE. Why, no—I was—I was just going in for a few minutes. It is nice and cool in there and I like to play on the organ.

MRS. PICKINS. I want t' know.

DICK *(coming down)*. You want to know altogether too much. You are interested in everybody's business but your own.

MRS. PICKINS. What's that ? Be you talkin' to me ?

DICK. I guess I am. If nobody else will tell you what they think of you, I will.

(DICK and MRS. PICKINS down C., IRENE up R.)

MRS. PICKINS. Oh ! you will ? You're a pretty one t' talk. *(Going at him with her parasol, which she seizes from table.)* You impudent, sassy upstart ! *(Chases him about stage.)*

(Enter PHILIP, R. U. E. and sees them.)

PHILIP. What is this ? Why, Mrs. Pickins—Dr. Dick !

MRS. PICKINS *(pausing—to PHILIP)*. Be you goin' t' stand there and hear me insulted ? Me ! a respectable woman what minds her own business, and —

THE FINGER OF SCORN

PHILIP. I did not hear it, Mrs. Pickins.

MRS. PICKINS. Well, I don't never quarrel nor have no words with nobuddy—'tain't my way—but I ain't goin' t' stand no more abuse from this young rowdy. It's gone far enough.

PHILIP. So it has. I will ask Dr. Heritage to explain.

MRS. PICKINS. Oh! you're goin' t' take his explanation and not mine, be you?

PHILIP. Why, I am sure the doctor did not intend to abuse you, Mrs. Pickins.

MRS. PICKINS. I'd like t' know what you call it. I've stood it about long enough. (*Preparing to go.*) But you can take his word for it if you want to (*pointing to IRENE, scornfully*) and hern too, for all I care. I don't stay where I can see I ain't wanted. 'Tain't my way. When you want my explanation, you know where I live. (*Flounces up C. and into BESS, who enters C. D. L.*)

BESS. Oh!

MRS. PICKINS (*pausing*). I should like to know how many more times you're goin' t' bunk into me!

BESS. Excuse me, but I should say it was you bunked into me, that time.

MRS. PICKINS. Hold your tongue! (*Rushes out C. D. L.*)

BESS (*coming down*). Well! Did you ever?

DICK. Whew! what a hurricane!

(*IRENE comes down R., sits by table.*)

BESS. I guess she's mad again.

DICK. It looks very much like it.

IRENE. Poor Mrs. Pickins has a very unhappy disposition. (*Comes down R.*)

PHILIP. Yes; we must have lots of charity for her. Her intentions may be all right.

DICK. And her attentions all wrong. I can't have any charity for her. She never has any for other people.

PHILIP. Ah! that is the very reason, then, why we should be charitable toward her.

(*PHILIP R., near IRENE; DICK and BESS L.*)

DICK. Oh, dear! I suppose so; but I'm not good enough for that yet.

BESS. I should say not. (*Sits on sofa.*)

THE FINGER OF SCORN

DICK. Oh, but I didn't want you to say so, you know.

BESS. And why not? It's true.

DICK. Well—er—yes, maybe; but —(*sitting beside her*)
that isn't your opinion, I'm sure.

BESS. Oh! Isn't it? (*Jumps up.*)

DICK. What?

(*PHILIP and IRENE go up R., conversing in pantomime;
DICK and BESS down C.*)

BESS. I suppose you think you're the best man in the world, don't you?

DICK. Why, no—but I supposed you thought so.

BESS. I? The idea! You needn't flatter yourself.

DICK. Why, Bess, what's the matter?

BESS. Don't speak to me! (*Runs off C. to L.*)

DICK (*after standing looking after her a moment, dazed*).
Well! what now, I wonder? (*Runs out after her.*)

PHILIP (*as they come down*). Ah, how true it is that the course of true love never runs smooth. Now, they have been engaged only two days, and they are having a quarrel already.

IRENE. So you have consented?

PHILIP. Yes; but they are not to be married for a year or so, at least.

IRENE. How happy they will be!

PHILIP. And our happiness, Irene? What of that?

IRENE. Happiness? Is there such a thing as happiness for me?

PHILIP. Yes, yes; surely there is, with my love and protection —

IRENE. But think—of him—of the danger —

PHILIP. I do not forget. We can only hope, and wait.

IRENE. And you still want me to be your wife—in spite of all?

PHILIP. Through all and in spite of all, yes. (*He takes her hand; they stand a moment in silence, looking into each other's eyes, tenderly.*) Have you seen him to-day?

IRENE. No, I have not dared; but I have just seen Dr. Heritage. He says that he must be moved; he must be where he can have more air.

PHILIP. Yes, and at once. We must confide in Peters and get his assistance. He will be a faithful sentinel and

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- never betray us. (*Goes up; looks R. and L.*) I think you can go in the church now.
- IRENE (*up*). Will it be safe?
- PHILIP. Yes; I will watch. Have courage, dear heart, and hope for the best.
- IRENE. I will try.
- (*Exit IRENE R. U. E., as NORMAN WEIR enters D. F. from L.*)
- NORMAN (*pauses in door, looks after IRENE, then comes down*). Philip Dunchester, I have come to warn you.
- PHILIP. Warn me? I—what do you mean?
- NORMAN. I mean that there is not a moment to lose if you would save John Gordon.
- PHILIP. Then you know—you ——?
- NORMAN. Yes. Am I not a detective? For what else did I come here? He is hidden in that church, where his daughter has just gone to join him. They are not safe there a single moment. We must help them.
- PHILIP. But I do not understand. Last night you were helping to hunt him down; now you offer to assist in his escape. What does it mean?
- NORMAN. It means that I have come to my senses, that the humanity within me has conquered over a feeling of wounded vanity and a desire for revenge. It has not been without a struggle, Philip, but since last night I have thought of nothing but her suffering, and my heart is not able to withstand its own pleadings to help her. I want to prove that I am her friend, and yours. Will you trust me? (*Extending his hand.*)
- PHILIP (*hesitating a moment, while he looks straight into WEIR's eyes; then grasping his hand*). I will.
- NORMAN. Thank you. You will not regret it. Now we must act. Blake and his men are about to search the church again, and we must be quick if we would outwit them.
- PHILIP. But your duty to the law?
- NORMAN. There is a higher law than that of any earthly tribunal. I need not tell you that. My duty is to that law now. Come.
- PHILIP. Norman Weir, Heaven will reward you for this act. You are indeed a friend. (*Again grasps his hand, warmly, as they exeunt R. I E. Just after they disappear, BESS enters C. D. L., in a pet, followed by DICK.*)

THE FINGER OF SCORN

BESS. Don't speak to me !

DICK. But—why not ?

BESS. Because.

DICK. Oh, because ! That's a very good reason.

BESS. Of course it is. Because I don't want you to. That ought to be sufficient.

DICK. Well, I suppose if you don't want to tell me what's the matter with you, you won't. I can't imagine what you're mad about.

BESS (*flouncing herself on sofa*). Don't talk to me.

DICK. But I haven't anybody else to talk to.

BESS. Goodness sakes !—then don't talk.

DICK (*about to sit by her side*). I can't tell you how much I love you if I don't. (*She spreads out her skirts on both sides so that there is no room for him to sit on sofa.*) I—I guess I couldn't tell you that, though, if I were to talk forever. I love you so much. (*Puzzled.*) Shall I sit on your lap ?

BESS. The idea ! No, certainly not.

DICK. There isn't any other place.

BESS. Aren't there chairs enough over there ?

DICK. But I don't want to sit on a chair.

BESS. Oh, take the whole sofa, then ! (*Jumping up.*)

DICK. I don't want the whole sofa. It was made for two, at least.

BESS. Ah, indeed ? You'd better get Miss Arnold to sit on it with you, then.

DICK (*as he slowly comprehends*). O-oh, Bess ! You're not jealous ?

BESS. Hm ! I should hope not.

DICK. And so should I. But you are, though. You saw me sitting on the sofa with Miss Arnold, and you are jealous of her.

BESS. I'm not any such thing !

DICK. Oh, yes, you are. Do you know, that's the very best compliment you can pay me—to get jealous. It proves you love me.

BESS. I don't love you—I don't !

DICK. Oh, Bess ! Didn't your Sunday-school teacher ever tell you not to tell fibs ? It wasn't an hour ago that you vowed you loved me more than—more than—anything ! (*Coaxingly.*) Come, Bess, let's make up. Don't act so.

THE FINGER OF SCORN

BESS (*relenting slightly*). Then tell me what you and she were sitting there for.

DICK. Why—a—she had something to tell me.

BESS. What was it?

DICK. Oh, I—why, nothing much.

BESS. You won't tell me, then?

DICK. I can't, Bess.

BESS. It's a secret, is it?

DICK. Y-yes, it is.

BESS. How can you have a secret from me, and we engaged? I think it's dreadful! (*Cries.*)

DICK (*coaxingly*). Now, Bess, don't.

BESS (*boo-hooing*). Let me alone!

DICK. It wasn't anything you ought to know, really it wasn't. It was only a professional secret. You must remember, I am a physician now, and have got to have some professional secrets. Besides, it is something I promised not to tell.

BESS. You know you shouldn't make such promises and keep things from me. But I don't care. You may consider our engagement broken, Mr. Heritage.

DICK (*at first dumfounded, then assuming an injured air*). What! You mean to say—oh, very well. If you cannot trust me any more than that, we may as well break it, now and here. I dare say we would be very unhappy together. (*He starts to go up C.*)

BESS (*faintly*). Dick! (*He pretends not to hear her. She calls again, a little louder.*) Dick! (*Still he does not turn.*) Dear Dick!

DICK (*turning*). Did you speak to me, Miss Dunchester?

BESS. Oh, Dick, I—didn't mean it. (*Half crying.*) I didn't mean —

DICK. To what do you refer?

BESS. What I said—that I di-didn't l-love you. I—I d-do, Dick, I d-do.

DICK. I don't want you to make any mistake this time.

BESS. No, I'm not. I made a mistake when I acted so. I am sorry, now. P-please forgive me!

DICK (*sternly*). Well, I don't know as—(*suddenly melting*)—as there is anything to forgive—my dear! (*He opens his arms and she falls into them, burying her face on his shoulder. Then she raises her face to his, he kisses her, and they go up C., as BINA enters R. I E.*)

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BINA. Laws a massy! Ah hope Ah don't int'feah 'r nuffin. (DICK and BESS pay no attention to her.) Ah say, Ah hope Ah ain' int'ruptin'. (DICK and BESS go out C. D. L., arm in arm.) Ah guess dey done gone turned deaf. He! he! ain' got ears n'r eyes f'r no-buddy n'r nuffin but deyse'fs, ca'se dey's in lub. (Goes up, chuckling to herself.) Dat dinner's gwine all spile 'f somebuddy don' come 'long 'n' eat it 'fore long. (Casually looks off C. to L., then to R.) Oh! Oh, bress my soul! Dere's de sherr'ff 'n' de const'bles gwine int' de church. Oh, what gwine happ'n? Mebby dey'll fin' dat ole man. Oh, Ah's so scart! (Greatly agitated, etc.)

(IRENE ARNOLD appears in R. U. E.)

IRENE (*huskily*). Aunt Bina!

BINA. 'S dat you, Miss Irene? What is it? What's de mattah?

IRENE. My father! They are bringing him here.

BINA. In yuh?

IRENE. Yes. The sheriff is about to search the church again, and we dare not leave him there. Mr. Dunchester has spirited him into the house by the back way. Oh, I am so frightened! I am sure they will find him.

BINA (*consolingly*). Dere, dere, don' yo' be 'fraid. Ah guess dey won't git 'im. Don' yo' worry. (*Looks off to R.*) Dere dey goes int' de church now. See!

IRENE (*looking off*). Then they think he is still there. Ah, Peters is with them.

BINA. Yes, he done show 'em in.

IRENE. Then he knows and is trying to mislead them. They may be satisfied and go away. (*Goes R.*)

BINA (*in C. D.*). Yuh comes Doctah Dick.

(IRENE turns. DICK enters C. D. L., as Bina exits R. I E.)

DICK. Blake is in the church with his men. I fear —

IRENE. He is not there.

DICK. Your fater?

IRENE. He is here—in the house. (*Points up R.*) There! With Mr. Dunchester and Mr. Weir.

DICK. Weir?

THE FINGER OF SCORN

IRENE. Yes. He knows all and is aiding us.

DICK. He—aiding you—why, I do not understand.

IRENE. Nor I. Only that he has changed suddenly and seems to be our friend.

DICK. Do you not mistrust his motives?

IRENE. He appears to be sincere. I can only hope that he is so.

(*Enter BESS, C. D. L.*)

BESS (*to DICK*). Oh, here you are. What made you run away from me so suddenly?

DICK. Did I? Why, I didn't mean to.

BESS. But you did. How funny everybody acts. Why I just saw the sheriff and the constables come out of the church.

IRENE. You say you saw them come out of the church?

BESS. I certainly did. What's it all about?

DICK. Are you sure they came out?

BESS. Why, of course they did, just this minute. I don't see what they were doing in there.

DICK. Never mind.

BESS. Never mind? That's just the way——

IRENE. And where did they go?

BESS. Into the house, by the back door.

IRENE (*alarmed*). Oh, what shall we do? I fear it is the end. (*Starts toward R. and meets NORMAN WEIR, who enters R. U. E.*) Mr. Weir—what—what has happened?

NORMAN. Do not be alarmed.

IRENE. They have found him?

NORMAN. No.

(*IRENE runs off R. U. E.*)

DICK. But you think they will?

NORMAN. If we don't outwit them.

BESS (*much perplexed*). Who—what? What is it? Dick, tell me.

DICK. No, not now. Wait.

BESS. Oh, dear!

(*Enter JOHN GORDON, R. U. E., assisted by IRENE and PHILIP. NORMAN motions them to place him on sofa L., which they do. GORDON seems too weak to speak*)

THE FINGER OF SCORN

and sinks back lifelessly. IRENE bends over him ; WEIR seizes shawl from back of chair R. C. and throws it over back of sofa on which GORDON is seated, so that it covers his head and shoulders, then motions IRENE and BESS to stand so that GORDON is hidden from view. BESS submits in a perplexed manner. DICK whispers to her, she looks surprised, then nods assent and puts on an air of gaiety, chatting in pantomime with IRENE, etc., while BLAKE and men are on. NORMAN is C. ; DICK L. C., PHILIP up R. C.)

NORMAN. Now we are ready.

PHILIP. And just in time. They are coming.

(Enter BINA, R. U. E., in excitement.)

BINA. De sher'ff's yuh, sah.

PHILIP. Let him come in.

BINA. An' de const'bles.

PHILIP. Very well.

(As he speaks, BLAKE enters R. U. E., followed by the two men.)

NORMAN *(going up)*. Ah, Mr. Blake, so you are here again. Anything new?

BLAKE. Yes, sir ; I be'n follerin' up them clues. We've be'n through th' church agin, but we didn't find th' man.

NORMAN. So he isn't there?

BLAKE. No, he ain't, not now. But he has be'n. It's my opinion he's hid right in this house, now.

NORMAN. Well, if that is your opinion, perhaps we had better continue the search. I don't think Mr. Duncheater will object.

PHILIP. Certainly not.

BLAKE. We don't want no half-way business this time. We're goin' t' do it thor'er, parson 'r no parson.

PHILIP. I shall not hinder you in the least.

BLAKE. Well, sir, y' see, it's business. We'll get right at it. Mr. Weir, you take Barber and go that way, *(indicating L.)*, and I'll take Higgins and go this. We'll be sure this time.

NORMAN. That's a good plan. *L. of C.*

THE FINGER OF SCORN

(*Exeunt BLAKE and one man R. U. E. ; NORMAN and the other man L.*)

IRENE (*who has tried to act unconcerned, now in breathless fear*). Oh, how will it all end? Father! father!
(*Lifts shawl and bends over GORDON, who does not look up.*)

PHILIP (*near her*). Have courage. I am sure Mr. Weir will get them away and then there will be no more danger.

IRENE. Oh, I pray Heaven that it may be so. (*Falls on her knees by GORDON'S side, burying her face in hands on his knees.*)

PHILIP (*helping her to rise*). Come, you must compose yourself. They may return.

IRENE (*rising*). Yes, yes; I must not betray myself.

(*PHILIP and IRENE walk to R. DICK bends over GORDON, starts, looks alarmed, puts his hand over the old man's heart. BESS has gone up stage and is looking off both sides, meanwhile conversing in dumb show with BINA.*)

DICK. Miss Arnold, perhaps you had better go to your room; there is no more danger, and —

IRENE. No, no, I could not bear the suspense. I must stay here until he is safe.

DICK (*aside*). Safe!

(*DICK is about to replace shawl over GORDON'S face, when BLAKE appears in R. U. E., seeing GORDON.*)

BLAKE (*advancing and pointing*). There's my man.

IRENE (*with a cry of terror, springing between BLAKE and GORDON*). No, no! You shall not have him!

BLAKE. He is my prisoner.

IRENE. No! I say he is not!

BLAKE. You'd better stand aside, miss. I've got th' law of th' land t' back me up.

IRENE. And the law of humanity backs me up—the law of love and duty. He is my father; he is ill, perhaps dying. You would not take him from me!

BLAKE. I must, miss. (*Going toward her.*) It's my duty as an officer.

IRENE (*in desperation*). You shall not!

THE FINGER OF SCORN

PHILIP. Irene—come. (*To BLAKE.*) Mr. Blake, one moment.

BLAKE. No, sir, you can't hoodwink me agin.

(*Enter NORMAN, L., followed by man.*)

NORMAN. What is it? (*To C.*)

BLAKE. I've found my man. (*Pointing.*) There he is! Ain't that th' one we're after, Mr. Weir?

(*NORMAN is about to speak when DICK holds up his hand.*)

DICK. No, he is not yours.

BLAKE. What ——

DICK (*calmly*). He is free—forever.

(*All look surprised and awed. IRENE glances at GORDON, comprehends, is about to faint and is caught in PHILIP'S arms. DICK drops the shawl over GORDON'S face.*)

TABLEAU

PHILIP and IRENE R. C. ; BLAKE C., a little back ; NORMAN L. C. ; DICK L. of GORDON ; BESS and BINA L. C., back ; constables R. and L., well back.

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